DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 143 485 RC 010 069

AUTHOR	Hubbert, Millie
TITLE	Kekuhegun. (A Milestone). Programs for Indian High School Students in Canada.
INSTITUTION	Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Toronto (Ontario). Education Div.
PUB DATE	76
NOTE	41p.; Related documents include RC 010 067-069
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*American Indians; Boarding Schools; *Canada Natives; Cocurricular Activities; Community Involvement; *Curriculum; Educational Philosophy; *Educational Programs; *Ethnic Studies; Foreign Countries; Parent Participation; Program Descriptions; Reservations (Indian); School Orientation; *Secondary Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Canada

ABSTRACT

In a country as diverse as Canada, no single school system could adequately serve all students. Programs vary markedly across the country and even within provinces, as the schools strive to accommodate the vast differences among the students. With a few exceptions, high school students of Native ancestry attend the regular provincial high schools that serve all other Canadians. The number of Native students in any high school is comparatively small, usually comprising no more than 10-12% of the total enrollment. Basically, the Native students undertake the same programs as all others, in one of the three main branches of study--Academic, Business and Commercial, or Vocational and Technical. Along with a core of "required" subjects, the schools offer a wide variety of options. This publication describes the high school programs available to Indian students in Canada. Discussed are the format and philosophies of the Native studies programs, Native language, arts and crafts, field trips, Native participation, general options offered, extracurricular activities, orientation, parental involvement, boarding homes, difficulties encountered--dropouts and social problems, and the reserve high school. (Author/NQ)

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ED143485

Indian and Eskimo Affairs Program
Education and Cultural Development

Kekúhegun

A Milestone

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Published under authority of the
Hon. Warren Allmand,
Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs,
Ottawa, 1976.
QS-5049-000-EE-A1

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Catalogue No. R32-38/1976-3
ISBN 0-662-00189-3
Design: Gottschalk + Ash Ltd.

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Preface

This is the third in a series of brochures describing school programs available to Indian students in Canada. Nistum ā Kesikak, Cree words meaning "the first day" describes the kindergarten programs; Opikawak meaning "they grow up" describes the elementary school programs and Kekúhegun, an Ojibwe word meaning "a milestone" describes the high school programs.

We are deeply indebted to the many students and teachers working in various Federal and Provincial schools across Canada who contributed their time and their talents to the development of this brochure. Frederik Stevenson, a freelance photographer in Ottawa, took the photographs in all three brochures. He also prepared the photo-sequences which follow and which vividly describe some of the exciting developments in the high schools attended by Indian students. Millie Hubbert, a former Classroom Consultant with the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, gathered the descriptive material.

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Introduction

In a country as diverse as Canada, no single school system could adequately serve all students. Programs vary markedly across the country and even within provinces, as the schools strive to accommodate the vast differences among the students who attend.

With a few exceptions, later described, high school students of Native ancestry attend the regular provincial high schools that serve all other Canadians. Some attend a high school close to their reserve homes, after completing an elementary program in a nearby provincial school. Others commute daily by bus from outlying areas where they may have attended an elementary provincial school, or a federal day school established on the reserve. Still others, who live in remote areas, board in larger centres while they attend high school. If they are close enough, they usually go home on weekends or if the distance is too great for frequent visits, they go home for holidays at Christmas time and during the summer. Each of the above instances presents a different situation for the receiving school.

Modern high schools tend to be large institutions, offering a wide variety of courses which have been defined by the Provincial departments of Education. The number of Native students in any High School is comparatively small, usually comprising no more than 10%-12% of the total enrolment. Basically, the Native students undertake the same programs as all others, in one of the three main branches of study—Academic, Business and Commercial, or Vocational and Technical. Each stream involves a core of "required" subjects plus a wide variety of options.

Modern High schools offer a wide variety of courses as defined by the Provincial departments of Education. One such school is the Dauphin Secondary School in Dauphin, Manitoba which, in addition to basic academic skills, offers full vocational and commercial options.

Included in these photographs are students pursuing the study of chemistry, welding, machine shop practice and typing. Because of the high percentage of Indian students at this particular school, (35%), it employs the services of a full-time native guidance counsellor.

Native Studies

Format

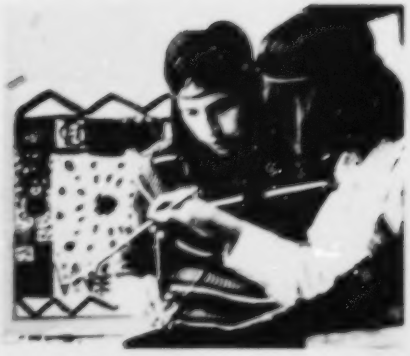
Within their options, many high schools now offer some type of program in Native studies, particularly where Indian students attend in suitable numbers. The Native studies program may include Native history, both local and continental, Native language, arts and crafts, Band government, the Indian Act, the treaties and a discussion of contemporary topics. The availability of material and resource people may be the determining factors for the content of the program. For example, a study of the Native people of North America may be readily undertaken, while a study of the local Band may be handicapped by a lack of information at the local level. Students therefore may be obliged to undertake their own research, to explore at first hand the history of their own people, and to record their own stories and legends in either English, French or the Native tongue. This type of participation in course development has resulted in some outstanding programs, such as the Cree Way Project at Fort George, P.Q. or the Stoney Cultural Education Program at Morley, Alberta, to name but two. There are many more.

Native Language

Programs in Native languages vary according to the language spoken by the students and their facility with the language. Where the Indian students already speak their own language, the lessons may concentrate on expanding oral language and then move into the areas of reading and writing. In mixed classes of Indian and non-Indian students who speak only English, the Native language may be taught as a second language, with the usual drill and practice. A third situation arises where the Indian students come not from a single language group, but from many. In this instance, the program offered depends on the language resource people available to assist the school, and thus the course or courses offered are optional to all students.

Within the flexibility of today's schools, the Native language may be offered as a full high school credit course, and an increasing number of universities now accept credits in a Native language for entrance requirements. As a matter of interest, a majority of Canadian universities now offer courses in one or more native languages as a regular part of their progam.

Morley Federal Junior high school students at Morley, Alberta, are offered a unique opportunity to work with traditional designs, motifs, and legends. Once a week they are bused to the Banff School of Fine Arts where they spend a half day with their provincial counterparts receiving top level instruction and practical experience in virtually any art form. Here potters pot, painters paint, weavers weave, and a drama group acts out Indian legends in pantomime.



Frustrating moments in beadwork; the finished product, in Richibucto, New Brunswick; picking a project in Lytton, B.C.; articles on display in Wallaceburg, Ontario, and a mural telling the story of the founding of the school on the James Smith reserve near Kinistino, Saskatchewan.

Arts and Crafts

In art classes that encourage creativity, the Native expression is fostered and cherished. Displays of work are seen on the walls of classrooms and corridors: paintings, carvings, masks and woven hangings of Native design. Crafts studied may include beadwork, tanning, leatherwork, silver and argillite jewelry making, ceramics and pottery, all of which find eager students among the non-Indian group also. Canoes, paddies, snow shoes, lacrosse sticks, tikinagans (cradle boards) and teepees, have been made at various schools under the guidance of visiting Native craftsmen. The projects are as varied as the skills, talents and interests of the participants.

In one western high school (Carson Graham in North Vancouver) a Native sculptor from the nearby Squamish reserve worked all summer carving a totem pole which was then erected in the school courtyard. He was also active in the craft program of the school during the winter.

Students who do not take Native studies as a separate course may still be involved in the viewing of films and other visual aids. Annual displays of Indian arts and crafts are common, and Indian speakers and entertainers are often eagerly-anticipated visitors to the schools. Frequently the entertainers are young Native people who are particularly able to establish a rapport with the entire student body.

Open House also affords another opportunity for a special display of Native crafts. At Wallaceburg, Ontario, Indian girls in Native dress acted as guides and hostesses for the parents during Open House. At McArthur High School in Ottawa, the Indian students constructed a teepee and served bannock and corn soup to a delighted group of parents and other guests.

Field Trips

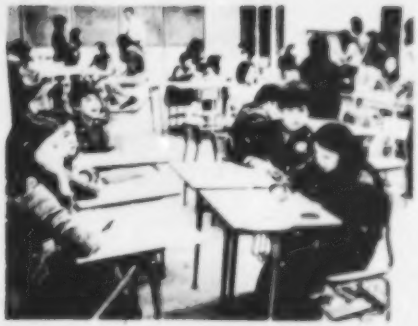
As part of the Native studies program, class visits have also been arranged to nearby reserves where the students have the opportunity of speaking to older Indian people who welcome them into their homes. Visits have been arranged to the Long House, to Band Council meetings, to the offices of Native organizations and to the Department of Indian Affairs.

A few more extensive trips have been organized by schools for exchange visits into remote areas where many students have had the opportunity to meet and talk to Native people of the North.

Native Participation

Nearly all programs in Native studies include the participation of Native people. They may serve as teachers, instructors, resource people or as visiting lecturers. Included are Indian parents, reserve representatives, Indian university students, and members of Native organizations who are particularly skillful in leading discussions on contemporary topics, and in presenting the Native point of view. Newspapers also provide a continuing source of discussion topics.

For a student who may have come from a non-academic background and thus may have difficulty in viewing himself in a professional role, the schools have made a special effort to invite Native people who have achieved professional status to visit and talk to the students. Colleges and universities have also been most helpful in acquainting Native students with the programs and opportunities offered on their campuses.



Elders from the Big Cove reserve school in New Brunswick transform a rowdy class into attentive would-be apprentices in the age-old art of basket-weaving.

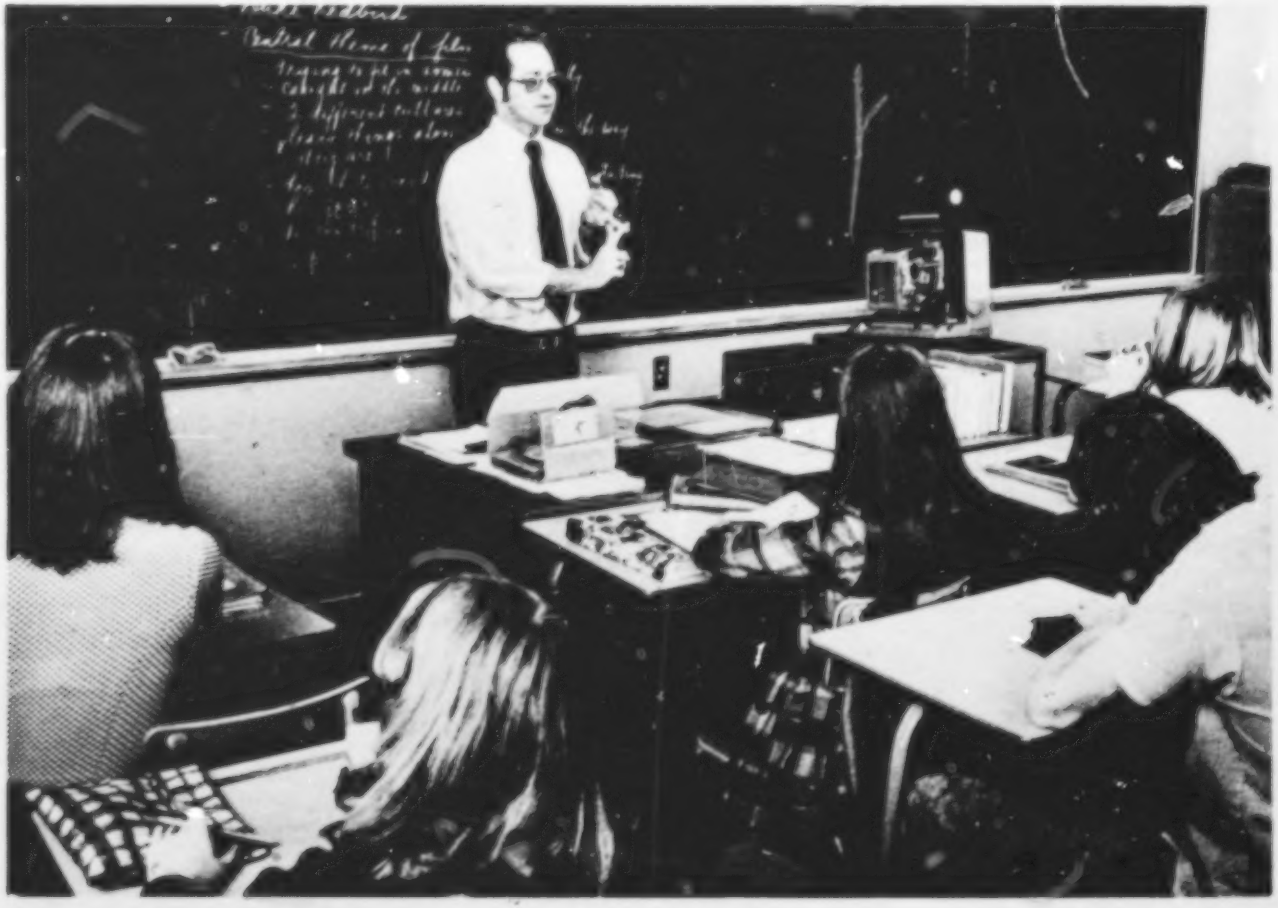
Philosophies

Generally the format of the Native studies program is influenced by the size of the Native body in the school, the location of the high school, the support of the parents, and the attitude of the school. Not all schools serving Indian students have such a program and not all Native students show an interest. A few schools limit the course to Indian students, but most offer it as a general option open to all. Sometimes schools find that the non-Indian students are the most enthusiastic participants.

The program is also guided by what is taught at the elementary level and Native studies are becoming increasingly popular in reserve schools. It is here that Indian students are gathered in large numbers and the parents and elders are readily available as resource people and advisers. Schools that are situated in areas of strong Indian culture where Native festivities and activities are already an integral part of the community life tend to offer fewer culturally-oriented school programs.

In some instances formal school programs have been proposed but are waiting for Band approval. On the other hand, there are reserves that would wholeheartedly endorse a native studies program if the school would extend the invitation and enlist their help.

Additional activities in James Smith, Saskatchewan, Lytton, B.C. and Wallaceburg, Ontario schools.



General Options

While Indian students are entering academic programs in increasing numbers, additional courses are available that may be of particular interest to them. These include special language development courses particularly for those whose mother tongue is a Native language, upgrading programs, reading development, and 'work experience' courses. The latter consist of a basic academic program, supplemented by work experience in the community. Students may receive apprentice pay through the cooperation of the Department of Manpower. Popular sites for the part-time jobs are stores, offices, service centers, florist shops, trucking firms, hospitals and nursery schools. The cooperation of the local business community is essential to the success of the program and in some areas the program has been operating for several years. Some work experience programs include activities related to the North, such as small motor repair, home building and tourist accommodation.

More than simply an extracurricular activity, music at Agassiz, B.C. and at Wallaceburg, Ontario is a credit course.

Extracurricular Activities

Native students, like all others, vary in their interests. Some play a leading role in the school's extracurricular activities, while others are not involved. Where students are bused to school, transportation schedules may prevent them from staying after school, although an extra late bus is sometimes provided to meet this need. One Nova Scotia high school undertakes its extracurricular activities during an extended noon hour in order to accommodate the bus students.

An Ottawa school sets aside one night a week when Native students may return to school to take part in Native activities that are not available during the daytime. A time and a place to meet their friends is considered as important as the actual activity.

Many Indian students display a particular aptitude in sports and have led their schools in sporting activities. However, if preliminary practice for school teams takes place in late summer before school begins, the Indian students may not be able to participate.

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Orientation

Entering a large, impersonal high school from a small elementary school is a difficult transition for young people, and many high schools offer general orientation programs to meet this need. Native students who are within a suitable distance take part in these activities. Native students from remote areas experience not only the adjustment problem of a strange school, but also the insecurity of a new and different language and social setting. To ease the transition, special orientation programs have been instituted during the week prior to school opening and include the help of senior students, Indian university students, and personnel from Indian Friendship Centers. The programs may include an introduction to the city, transportation patterns on buses and subways, meeting boarding home parents, visits to Friendship Centers, churches and shopping plazas, and discussions about the handling of money and other areas of responsibility. This is in addition to the orientation to the school itself. Guidance counsellors from both the school and the Department of Indian Affairs are available for advice on both scholastic and social problems. Wherever possible, the counsellors are Native people.

Many elementary schools assist in this transition by planning a visit each year to a suitable urban center for the Grade Seven or Eight class that will be leaving them in the spring. Teachers and counsellors from city schools have also visited reserve communities in remote areas early in the spring to meet the parents and to help the incoming students plan their high school programs. A few teachers and counsellors have also made mid-term visits to the reserves with messages on audio and video tapes from the students attending high school. They then take return greetings back to the city from the parents.

One high school in the Sioux Lookout, Ontario, area established an all-Indian home room for students coming south for the first time. From this base the students move to their various classes during the first year, but return frequently to their home room and their friends. In the second year they are allocated in home rooms throughout the school along with all other students, but by this time they have acquired a feeling of security and have adjusted to the new routines.

The traditional sex roles are long gone. Contemporary classrooms see female students in machine shops and these young men comfortable (sort of) in the kitchen.

Parental Involvement

Communication between the school and the Indian home is difficult when the reserve is a great distance away from the school and reached only by airplane or by radio-telephone. However, most schools recognize the importance of involving the parents in the student's program if he is to achieve any real measure of success. The choosing of subjects, the setting of goals, and the out-of-school behaviour of the young people are all areas where the support of the parents is vital.

Indian parents are becoming increasingly aware of this need themselves. In one Northern Ontario settlement the parents of both status and non-status Indian students have formed a High School Parents' Association. They take a particular interest in the progress of the students who have left the reserve to go to high school. They meet with students who have dropped out of school, and confer with counsellors and supervisors whenever they are in the area to offer advice and assistance.

Through monthly meetings they raise money for a wide variety of purposes, from sending representative parents out to visit the students during the school year, to paying for special equipment, uniforms and other items that the school might request. They also arrange for activities for the students when they return home for the holidays. The enthusiastic interest and support of these parents are considered important factors in the motivation and success of their high school students.

Regrettably, not all schools and communities share this type of interest and apart from the basic communication of the regular report card, the contact of some schools with the home is only when a problem arises. Native social counsellors are trying to alleviate this problem however, and encourage the schools to relate to the parents on a more personal basis, particularly when there is something positive to report.

The science of discovery, wherein a well orchestrated science program in Agassiz, B.C. reinforces field trips with the laboratory techniques of observation, and the practice of the scientific method.

Boarding Homes

As the Indian home has a profound influence on the child's progress, the boarding home where he lives in the city also plays a vital role. Orientation programs for students may include the boarding home parents, and some school counsellors make a particular effort to keep in close contact with them.

Boarding home parents may be relatives of the students, or other Native people, or non-Natives who have expressed a particular interest in the Indian student's progress and welfare. Many such contacts have developed into lifelong friendships.

Group homes for Indian high school students have been successful, particularly for first-year students who have a particular need for the security of their friends. Both individuals and religious groups have offered this accommodation, usually with careful supervision of both academic and social activities which parents appreciate. In some places, former residential schools for younger children have been converted for use as group homes for high school students, while they attend the local high school in the area.

In Sioux Lookout, Ontario, a retrieval program has been instituted for students who may have dropped out of a high school program in the south, but who would like to continue their education nearer home. The location is an attractive northern lake within reach of a number of reserves. Grades 9, 10, and 11 are offered there, as well as an upgrading class for those who require it. The academic program is supplemented by trades training in activities suitable for reserve life—carpentry, wood-working, mechanics, small motor repair, and the operation of heavy duty equipment. Sports and recreation are also important features of the program. The students who attend this unique training program live in small group homes attached to the school.

The physical education program for junior high school students in Marievale (Sask.) includes the option of taking golf lessons at the band-owned and operated golf course adjacent to the school. The golf course offers work experience for some of the more dedicated club members.

Difficulties

Deportment
High schools usually report Indian students as being polite and well-behaved. When a problem arises, it often stems from a language misunderstanding, or a lack of experience with appropriate behaviour in the particular situation. The schools' chief concern is often poor attendance and this problem may be confined to one or two families. Where parents are interested and involved and where schools try to make the Indian student feel at home, poor attendance is not a problem. Academic students usually attend more regularly than vocational ones, and this pattern is true for non-Indian students as well. Once a student reaches the senior high school level, attendance is usually stable.

Drop-outs
While the drop-out rate of Indian students continues to be of concern to the high schools, this rate is diminishing each year. Students who are able to return home frequently to assure themselves of their family's well being are less likely to drop out of school than those who must remain away for long periods. If a crisis develops at home it is not unusual for a promising student to give up his studies and return home to offer support to his family. When the crisis is over he may return to school at a later date.

Social Problems
As with all students, problems that the Indian high school student encounters are often not within the school, but in the community. Drug and liquor abuse may be met for the first time when the student still lacks the experience and maturity needed to cope with them. On the reserve, conforming to the behaviour of his peers may be a form of strength to the teen-age youngster, but in a hostile, urban environment this conformity can be disastrous. A number of programs have therefore been instituted at both the elementary and the high school level to provide information on the social problems that the students are likely to encounter in the city, with guidance as to the best methods of coping with them.

The same pose serves equally well in academic and vocational settings in Lytton, B.C.

Reserve High Schools

With improved education and continuous progress general throughout the elementary schools, Indian students now reach the high school level at an age comparable to their non-Indian peers. Because of the uncertainty of the urban situation, some Indian parents feel that their children are too young to attend school a long way from home, and they have therefore requested continuing Grade Nine and Ten classes on the reserves. In a few cases the classes extend to Grades Eleven and Twelve.

In this type of situation, and there are perhaps half a dozen areas across Canada where this has happened, the entire school program from Kindergarten to Grade XII is under the direction of the local Band. The Band hires the teachers, helps to define the course of studies, maintains the buildings and deals with any problems that arise. The school programs usually include Native language and history, arts and crafts, with maximum involvement of local people as teachers, teacher aides, and visiting lecturers. In the evening the schools may be used as recreational and cultural centers for the adults. In spite of the very small high school enrolments, the schools do try to offer a variety of courses, especially those related to work on the reserve and in the local community.

The philosophy behind these high school classes on reserves, however, is not always clearly understood. Small classes and limited facilities place certain restrictions on the variety of courses and programs that can be offered. Thus, while these classes are geared towards providing opportunities for the continuation of a certain level of High School education, they must not be thought of as being parallel to those offered in a large urban situation.

In a décor of graffiti, which makes the room a comfortable space for senior high school students, at James Smith, Saskatchwan, a lady from the community teaches Cree.

In addition, these programs are aimed mainly at improving and strengthening those special skills that will be of the most direct help to the development of the reserve community. Communications skills in both Native and English or French languages, mathematical skills, understanding in the social sciences, particularly those relating to the culture and heritage of the Indian people, commercial and trade skills—these constitute the basic program of continuation classes on the reserve. Young people completing these programs will be in a stronger position to move into areas of Band management, to take further training as aides in educational or social programs on the reserve, or to continue with others forms of advanced education off the reserve.

As intimated earlier, the on-reserve continuation classes do not provide an automatic entry into equivalent "outside" programs. While most high schools will grant partial credit for the grades completed on the reserve, some repeating is usually required by the receiving system. The students themselves, however, are generally more mature and thus stand a better chance of coping with the problems facing them away from the reserve.

If this is clearly understood by all concerned, then the continuation courses on the reserve can be regarded as a useful part of the total program.

At present a more careful selection process is being considered with the assistance of parents, teachers and counsellors to try to determine the students most likely to benefit from further education off the reserve, and those who should remain at home at least until they have attained a greater degree of maturity. Like young people everywhere, some Indian students look forward to an extensive educational program and probable employment in larger centers; others regard the reserve as their permanent home. Both factors are being considered in the types of courses offered and recommended.

In a program designed to help students at all levels, high school students work at remedial reading with students at elementary levels.

Many Indian students display particular aptitude in sports and lead their schools in sporting activities. These particular pictures were taken at Dauphin Student Residence and Lytton, B.C.

Summation

It is unlikely that any single system will ever adequately serve the educational needs of the Indian children of Canada. The country is too vast, and the needs and aspirations of the students too diverse to be subject to any single solution. Though many innovative programs have been instituted, none is problem-free. Most programs are flexible and change as their strengths and weaknesses become apparent, and as the needs of the students demand. The programs are a reflection of the initiative and concern of Native people and others who are striving to serve the divergent needs of the Indian high school students of Canada.

Cramped quarters at Richibucto, New Brunswick do not even slow down a popular and active sewing class.

Carson Graham High School,
North Vancouver, C.B.